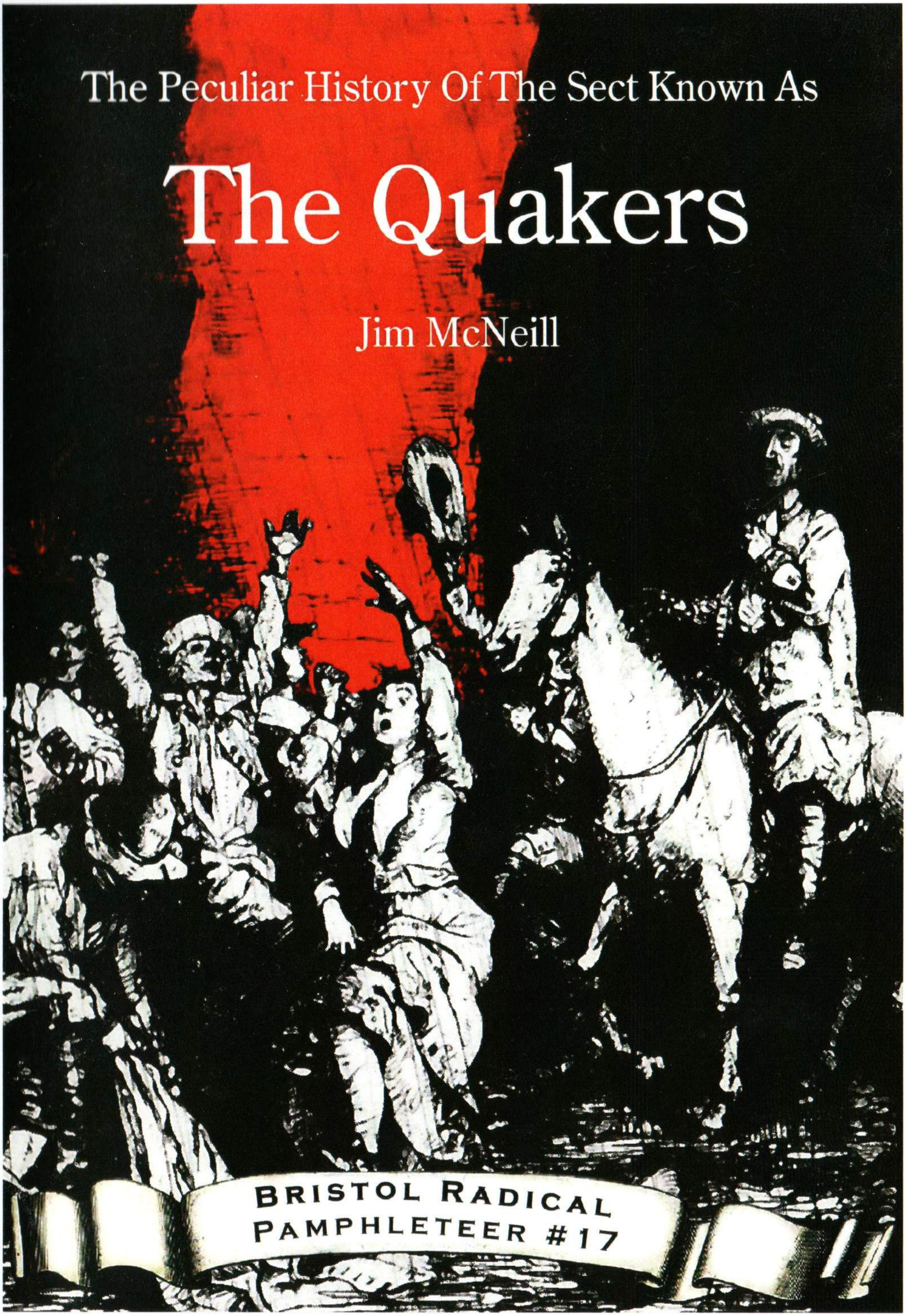
The Peculiar History Of The Sect Known As

The Quakers

Jim McNeill



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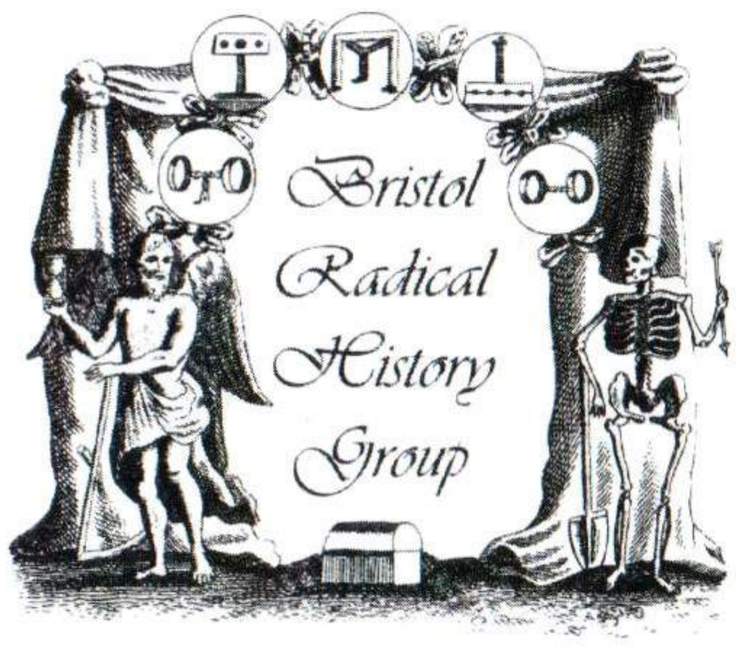

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How and why they moved from Radicalism to Conformism and with particular reference to their early history in Bristol

Introduction

Welcome to the first of two booklets on Quaker History. This one provides some guidance to the factors which gave rise to the Quaker religious sect in the mid-17th Century and attempts to show how, because of the severest of persecution of its members, Quakerism went on to become a conservative and conforming religious sect. The final section of this booklet is a short discussion on the role of a number of 17th Century leading Bristol Quakers who were involved in British colonial expansion and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

I hope this booklet whets your appetite for more knowledge on this subject and you go on to read the second publication on the vast family fortunes of the Quaker, aristocrat and slave-owner, William Penn.

> **Quakerism:** originally this was a name given to members of 'The Society of Friends' by its enemies ~ it refers to their members who would 'quake' when preaching or speaking at a meeting. Quakerism started in the North of England and spread to the South and Wales like 'a whirlwind from the North'.

How Did Quakerism Begin?

Quakerism was one of many radical, dissenting sects that grew out of the English Revolution of 1640-48; a revolution that freed up the thinking of numerous 'ordinary' men and women from the constraints and control of the feudal, monarchic state.

The revolutionary war and the excitement of radical change epitomised by the eventual overthrow of the monarchy and its state, allowed unprecedented freedom of thought and expression among the masses of people in English cities, towns and countryside. The revolutionary Protestant philosophy of the time was one of 'individualism' stemming from the belief that each person could communicate directly with God, without the need for an intermediary i.e. a priest. It meant that those who embraced this way of thinking also felt free to challenge local and/or national authority. For, if you claim to be acting under the direction of God, "doing God's will", then you could claim to be answerable to a power higher than that represented by your local Lord, Corporation, Magistrate or General.

In a real and unprecedented sense the English Revolution had the effect of changing people's perspective from one of 'looking back' to one of 'looking forward'. With the expansion of land clearances whereby land owners obtained control over the countryside, ordinary people were forced to move off the land and live in towns. As the lives of these displaced people were disrupted so was the way they began to perceive the world. These people became wage-earners; they were the embryonic working class.

Alongside this change in the attitude amongst the poor and the 'middling people' of England, the emergent involvement in the slave trade changed the way that merchants, landowners and employers looked upon all labour. Chattel-slavery[1], coupled with a newly emerging capitalist class meant that class differences were accentuated across Britain. Alongside this was the new capitalist-protestant work ethic which equated 'poverty' with 'sin' and 'profit' with doing 'God's will'.

Following the execution of Charles the First (1648) there was an explosion of printed and vocal propaganda from all kinds of radicals. One such radical was the weaver's son, George Fox, who for five years or so had been a preacher; imprisoned in Derby on a charge of blasphemy, and jailed at Nottingham for interrupting a church service. It was Fox who became the 'founder of Quakerism'. By 1652 the extreme radical movement 'Quakerism' had been formed and the numbers of people who claimed to be Quakers mushroomed. Fox also preached and converted people to Quakerism in the Low Counties and in the colonies of North America.

As a dissenter Fox had tapped into the popular resentment across the country towards ecclesiastical authority. Like many radicals he preached that there was only one authority, Christ, and that everyone could discover Christ within his or her

George Fox

own heart. His slogan was, "Christ has come to teach his people himself". This may not seem like a very radical phrase today but in the 1650s after eight years of Revolutionary War, which had seen people exert their will over the authority of the state and its Church, this slogan was a liberating call. Adherence to this call, this challenge, to state authority under both the Republican Commonwealth (1648-60) and the restored monarchy (1660), lead to numerous Quakers being fined, dispossessed and imprisoned.

Radicals, including Quakers, and like most Europeans of this period, believed the Earth to be just 4-6,000 years old and each person was a direct descendant of Adam and Eve who had existed when all land was owned in common and there were no priests, no intermediaries, between them and God. Early Quakers also opposed the idea of 'sin' - they saw as a method of control by clergy and bishops. It was their very dogma and self-belief that marked them out for persecution. The state machine was used against them; magistrates, judges, prison warders and clergy and they were often charged with the crimes of blasphemy and disturbing the peace. Yet, despite continual harassment, by 1660 there were 40,000 Quakers in the country and by 1700 perhaps as many as 60,000.

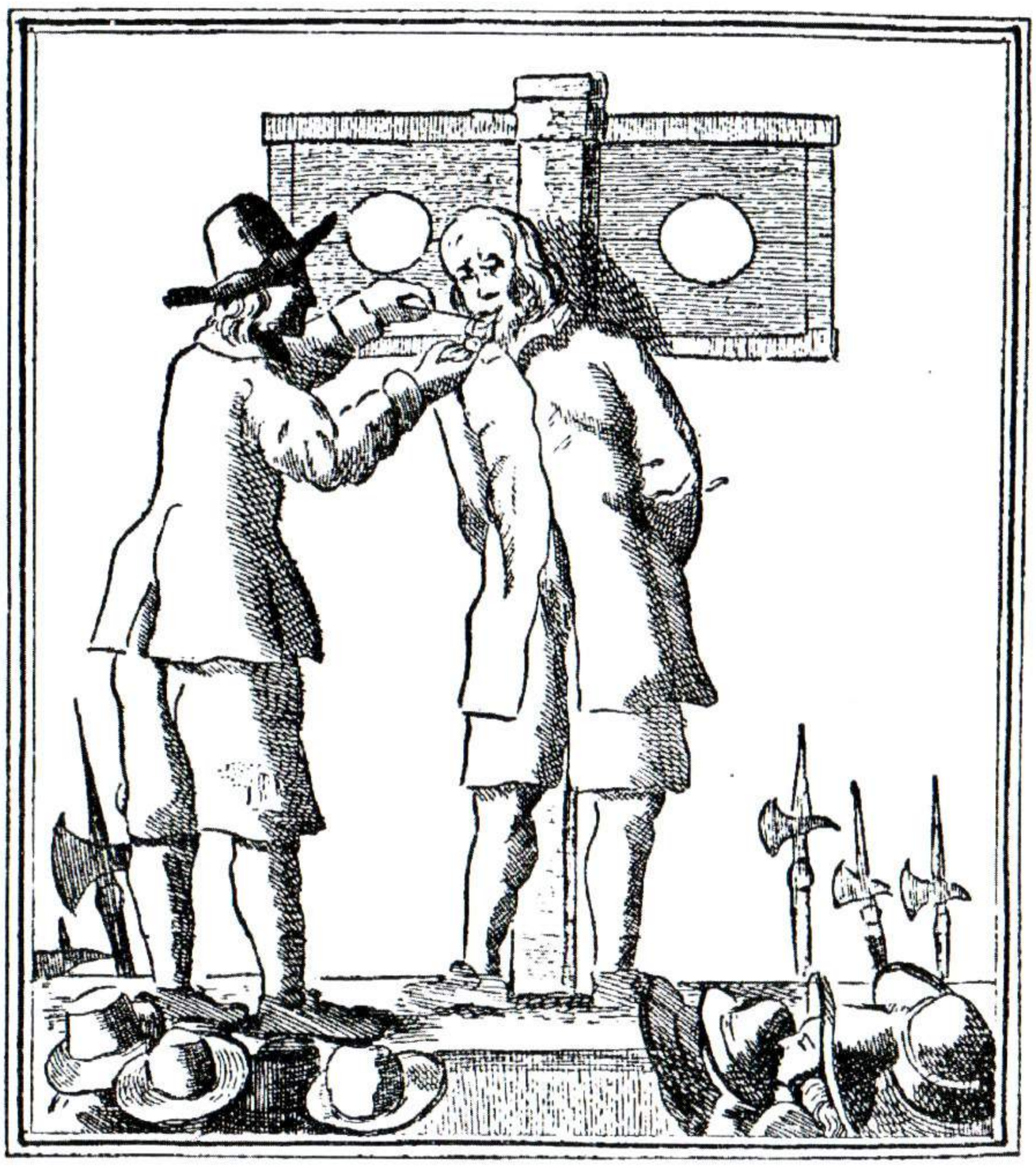
Early Quakerism In Bristol

The first Quakers arrived in Bristol in 1654. One of the first Bristolians to join them was Denis Hollister; an MP in the previous year's 'Barebones Parliament' and future father-in-law of William Penn. Very soon, Quakerism became so popular in Bristol that there were no halls or meeting places large enough to hold the numbers of people attending their gatherings and meetings had to be held in the fields around the city. In fact Bristol became one of the country's principal centres of Quakerism and by 1660 they numbered around 1,000 out of a population of 20,000.[a]

Satire on Quakers showing an assembly of deputies with George Whitehead presiding, William Penn at his right and "W Bingly" at his left; the journal of George Fox lies on the table, at the right end of which sits "B Bealiing, scribe" recording the proceedings. It originally appeared on a broadside by Francis Bugg alleging Quaker hypocrisy: 'Some Reasons Humbly Proposed to the Lords Spiritual and Temporal Assembled in Parliament, why the Quakers Principles and Practices should be Examined, and Censured or Suppressed', 21 May 1689.

Church of England clergy spoke out against Quakerism especially as Bristol Quakers, seeing themselves as living Apostles of Christ, disrupted services in Church of England churches. When the Quaker, James Naylor, dramatically entered Bristol in 1656 he was placed under arrest, branded, tied to a cart and flogged through the City's streets, and pilloried he never recovered from this treatment and was denounced by Fox and other leading Quakers.

James Naylor came from Wakefield in Yorkshire and, alongside Fox, was recognised as the leading Quaker and preacher on the national stage. His entrance on horseback into Bristol when his companions sang hosannas and cast garments before him was regarded by authorities as a blasphemous imitation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. His continual radicalism caused a rift with the more conservative sections of the 'Friends' and Fox in particular.



James Nayor having his tongue bored out. From Bristol Past And Present by James Fawckner Nicholls and John Taylor 1881.

There are also records of male and female Quakers being flogged in Bridewell Prison, Bristol. Quakers were fearless in their opposition to control by the state, whether national or local, over their meetings and gatherings for worship; they were extremely politically conscious. But, with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, this revolutionary-radicalism began to decline. They, along with other radical sects, now endured a long period of counter-revolution. The period of small presses independent of state control ended and, gradually, over the following decades, Quakers became more and more non-political.

Increasingly Quaker meetings came under the 'guidance' of their more conservative, wealthier members. Instead of adhering to a philosophy of direct action and involvement in political affairs, (a philosophy based on a belief that Eden was about to be re-created on Earth), a conservative outlook of 'Inner Light' and inner

reflection came to the fore. This retreat from former beliefs was a direct result of the deliberate, prolonged and ruthless persecution they suffered from the new Monarchical State:

1661: *The Corporation Act* prevented Quakers from holding public office and following apprenticed trades. Quakers refused to swear oaths on a bible (saying that their word alone was good enough), this led to them being open to punitive fines for 'non-swearing'.

Laws forbid them from recovering debts, administering estates or taking up the freedom of cities. As 'non-freemen' they were not allowed to carry out the many trades which were run by Guilds. Hence we see them moving into unregulated trades such as shop-keeping, money-lending (Quakers were the originators of Barclays, Lloyds and Nat-West banks) and metallurgy trades such as brass, copper and iron. Their harassment in Bristol was such that the Society of Merchant Venturers[2] paid local people to inform on them. In **1662** Hollister and 65 other Quakers were rounded up, arrested and joined 125 other Quakers in Bristol's Prisons.

1664: *The Conventicle Act* stated that no more than four people could meet in any one house for worship. Anyone breaking this law faced imprisonment and a fine. Bristol Quakers, and other non-conformist sects, were caught under this Act. However there were occasions were juries of Bristolians refused to persecute their neighbours, and, when three Bristol Quakers were sentenced to transportation to North America or the West Indies, sailors refused to carry them.

1670: A second *Conventicle Act* this excluded Quakers from their Meeting Rooms and in Bristol this included the New Room at Quakers Friars[3].

1673: *The Test Act* was passed which obliged all people of England to take Oath and Communion according to the rites of the Church of England.

In **1676** one non-conformist Bristol preacher drowned as he crossed a river in an attempt to escape. Preachers would go about in disguise in order to hold open-air meetings. Miners from Kingswood[4] attended many of these meetings. Numbers of people attending these unlawful gatherings were too great for the City's goals to cope and there are records of prisoners dying of suffocation. In just one example, the City Sheriff of Bristol 'caught and shut up' over eighty men and women who were outside of Lawfords Gate[5] returning from an open-air meeting.

During 1676-81 Quakers were relatively free of persecution. There then followed a mass round-up of all members of non-conformist sects. 1,500 people in Bristol were affected - their meeting rooms closed down and they were pursued and harassed by officers of the City at every turn.

In **1681** the Quakers Friars Meeting House was damaged to the cost of £150. Trained bands went around the City possessing Quaker buildings, closing down their shops and nailing up doors and windows. Quakers meeting in the open air in the streets of Bristol suffered a torrent of abuse and missiles were thrown by their fellow citizens. The Friars Meeting House was allowed to re-open but was soon attacked and a number of Quakers put under arrest while the others (some 101 people) were trapped in their Meeting House. The Meeting House was nailed up for around six hours with the members unable to escape.

Denied the opportunity to congregate in their own Meeting Rooms and Chapels Quakers, and other radicals, went out into the quarries and glens around Bristol. They met in Stapleton, Knowle, Brislington, Durdam Downs, Leigh Woods, etc. At Crews Hole, then east of Bristol, on the River Avon, an amphitheatre was created to hold hundreds of non-conformist dissidents. At Baptist Mills[6], Conham and Brislington thousands of people would gather and hear dissident preachers. At St Anne's Woods the local State authorities used dogs, whips and guns against such gatherings. Preachers were ambushed and put into Gloucestershire Goal.

Quakers who were imprisoned were known to have married inside jail and it may well have been that they also used their jail as a place of worship. Certainly their children, left alone in the City, organised their own meetings for which they were flogged with whalebone sticks and placed in public stocks.

In **1685** one hundred Quakers were released from Bristol's jails as part of an amnesty of 1,500 released nationally under a pardon by James II. But Quakers still suffered abuse and discrimination, in 1685 Hollister, Edward Pyott[7] and Thomas Goldney I (see below) were attacked in Corn Street in the heart of Bristol.

By the time these waves of persecution had come to an end the conservative, wealthier strand of inter-related Bristol Quakers had taken full control of the 'Friends' and any thoughts of the sect being Radical in the sense of challenging the state and authority on a national and local level were not entertained.

By **1728** the leading Bristol Quakers were no longer plain modest people, rather they came to their Meeting Houses in carriages and had discarded their distinctive plain dress.

Profiles of some leading early Bristol Quakers: how they were persecuted and how they engaged in and benefited from colonialism, privateering and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Thomas Goldney (1620-1694) was the son of one Gabriel Goldney, a prosperous clothier of Chippingham. Thomas was apprenticed to a Bristol grocer in 1637 and was probably attracted to the city because it was a thriving port with 'a flourishing trade to the West Indies' where his father had 'trading interests' (a probable euphemism for the slave trade and/or trade in commodities dependant on slave labour.

Thomas completed his apprenticeship in 1646 was made a freeman of the city and set up business as a grocer. He married Mary Clements (d1709), the daughter of a Bristol Merchant. One of their neighbours was Dennis Hollister. Hollister was also a grocer, and a dissenter who had been a Baptist until he joined the Quakers. It is thought that it was Hollister who encouraged Goldney and his wife to become Quakers.

In 1656 Thomas Goldney, Henry Roe, Edward Pyott, Dennis Hollister and George Bishop published, *The Cry of Blood and Herod* being a declaration of the Lord arising in those people who are scornfully called Quakers.[a]

On Christmas Day 1661, Goldney was one of a number of Quaker shopkeepers who stayed open to trade in direct defiance of the City Corporation and was sent to prison for this offence. He became a member of the small committees the Bristol Quakers set up to oversee their affairs.

Despite the 'sufferings' and persecutions that the Quaker Goldney family underwent Thomas prospered as a trader. In 1674 he bought a large, expensive country estate at Elberton in South Gloucestershire, 10 miles from Bristol.

In 1685 Goldney, amongst others, was fined the sum of £200 for refusal to take an oath. This same year Hollister, Pyott and Goldney were attacked in Corn Street in the heart of Bristol.

By 1688 the Corporation was encouraging the building on the Bristol's castle grounds Goldney bought sites for four houses on Castle Green for £200.

Thomas Goldney II (1664 - 1731) was the son of the above Thomas Goldney and also a Quaker. In 1688 he is given the Freedom of the City and six years later he acquired lease of a country house in Clifton – known as Goldney Hall (the Manor of Clifton, at this time, belonged to the Society of Merchant Venturers).

Thomas' father died in 1694 and Thomas II inherited the family's business and properties including the town houses in College Green and, in this year, he was listed as a £600 freeholder. He married Hannah Speed (who came with an £800 dowry) and in 1703 he also inherited a 'considerable fortune' from Hannah's father, Thomas Speed (1623-1703). It was with this inheritance that he bought the aforementioned Goldney Hall. Thomas Speed's money came from his business as an important Bristol merchant whose trade included: transportation of Irish prisoners to the West Indies (prior to his conversion to Quakerism); slave-produced sugar and tobacco; French wine; oil; dried fruit and, also, privateering ventures during the time of the Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652-74).[(a)]

Besides being a grocer Thomas had other business interests: he owned shares in ships, held land at Clevedon, farmland at Elberton, and acted as an agent for the Collector of Customs for the port of Bristol.

In 1707 Goldney backed Abraham Darby in his iron factory in Cheese Lane, Bristol (for Abraham Darby see below). He also backed Darby when Darby moved to Coalbrookdale. In 1713 Darby mortgaged half of his Coalbrookdale concern to Goldney for a loan of £1,700. By 1718 Goldney owned 8 of the 16 shares in the now named, Dale Company, these were worth £200 each. Goldney acted as an agent, money collector and banker for this metal-making company.

In 1708 he was the main backer of the Woodes Rogers Expedition with 36 shares in this investment each costing £103.10s. His fellow partners include; ex-mayors, aldermen, city clerks, sheriffs and other wealthy merchants. The Woodes Rogers Venture consisted of two ships; the *Duke* and the *Duchess*, which 'went out as Private Men of War and not as trading ships...'. The main object was to capture the two Spanish treasure ships which left South America twice a year to bring back plundered Aztec gold to Spain.

In April they captured the *Assention* with 50 - 60 Africans on board. On April 12th they attacked the town of Guayaquil[8] (population 100,000) set fires going and captured four barques. Later they stormed the town and accepted 25,500 pieces-of-eight in return for not burning down the town.

In total they captured twenty ships and one of the treasure ships. On board the *Duke* the Spanish treasure amassed filled three large chests with gold dust, plate, money and pearls. On the *Duchess* there were four chests of pearls, plate, gold and precious stones. They also had highly-prized maps which were valuable in their use for exploiting the resources of the South Americas. When the plunder was divided between the Merchant shareholders Thomas Goldney II, Quaker, had doubled his investment.

Thomas Goldney III was also a Quaker.

At the age of 21 he joined his father, Thomas Goldney II, on visits to Coalbrookdale, inherited £400 under the will of his grandfather, Thomas Speed, and owned two shares in the Quaker-run Dale Company in Coalbrookdale. From time to time he provided a half or one third of the capital required for the company's expansion.

In 1739 when war is declared with Spain; Goldney accounts showed deliveries from Coalbrookdale of large consignments of guns and cannon and casks of shot. Some of these guns were sold directly on the Bristol quayside to privateers or merchantmen. **Gabriel Goldney**, Thomas Goldney III's younger brother, paid just over £260 for guns and shot for the privateer the *Union*, of which he was part-owner. Thomas and Gabriel Goldney and their brother-in-law John Ball sent some shipments of guns, etc., 'at adventure' to New York, Boston and the West Indies.

Across the River Severn from Coalbrookdale Thomas III became a backer of the Willey furnace, which produced quality pig iron. He also became a partner in the Bursham furnace near Wrexham in Wales.

In 1750, in partnership with fellow Quaker William Champion, Thomas Goldney III invested in mining at Gronant in Flintshire, Wales This mine was primarily intended for the mining of lead, copper ore and calamine (calamine contains zinc which is used with copper to make brass). The mines proved to be a successful and led to further mining investments at Kellyn, Whitford and in Devon, Cornwall and Ireland.

In 1751, Goldney expanded into the shipping business. He bought shares in three ships, which brought iron goods from Coalbrookdale to Bristol and then onto Ireland, Devon and Cornwall. The shipping side of his business enabled the transport, supply and integration of the various industries he had investments in. It was

because of the complexity of his business empire that Thomas Goldney III went into banking.

In 1752, he entered into a banking partnership and founded the Bristol bank of *Goldney, Smith and Co.* it was one of the first six banks established in the country. It was in Corn Street - the very street where Goldney's grandfather had been publicly attacked sixty-seven years previously in 1685. After the deaths of the original partners, the bank went through a series of amalgamations. First, it became Miles' Bank, then Harford's Bank. It later merged with Old Bank before merging with the National Westminster Bank, which today is part of the notorious Royal Bank of Scotland.

In 1754, Thomas III provided the finance for Abraham Darby II's construction of a new furnace at Horsehay, just north of Coalbrookdale. This proved such a success that in 1756 a second and third furnace was opened nearby. In order for Thomas III and Abraham Darby II to integrate their industrial enterprises in 1757 they established a railway network to transport goods between their works.

Abraham Darby I (1678 – 1717)

Born at Wren's Nest near Birmingham, Abraham Darby was brought up and educated as a Quaker amongst Quakers

He made scientific and industrial advances of such importance that he is directly responsible for the way we all live today. His advances have touched people in every part of the globe and played an important role in enabling Britain to become the World's most dominant industrial, military and colonial power in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

His work, inventions and innovations at his new factories in Bristol (Cheese Lane and Baptist Mills) were to prove of immense importance to the future British Industrial Revolution.

The Bristol Brass Works Company he helped to establish at Baptist Mills was located at what is now the "St Paul's Roundabout", Junction 3 on the M32 Motorway. All traces of the Baptist Mills Brass Works, what was to become the headquarters of the Britain's most important brass and copper company, was completely wiped out when the M32 Motorway was constructed in the 1960s.

Darby personally went to the Low Countries and recruited skilled, Catholic brass

Cast Iron Bridge near Coalbrookdal, by William Williams 1777.

workers who knew the industrial secrets of brass production and the making of brass 'battery' (the process of using water power to drive hammers which shaped cold brass plate into various types of hollowware).

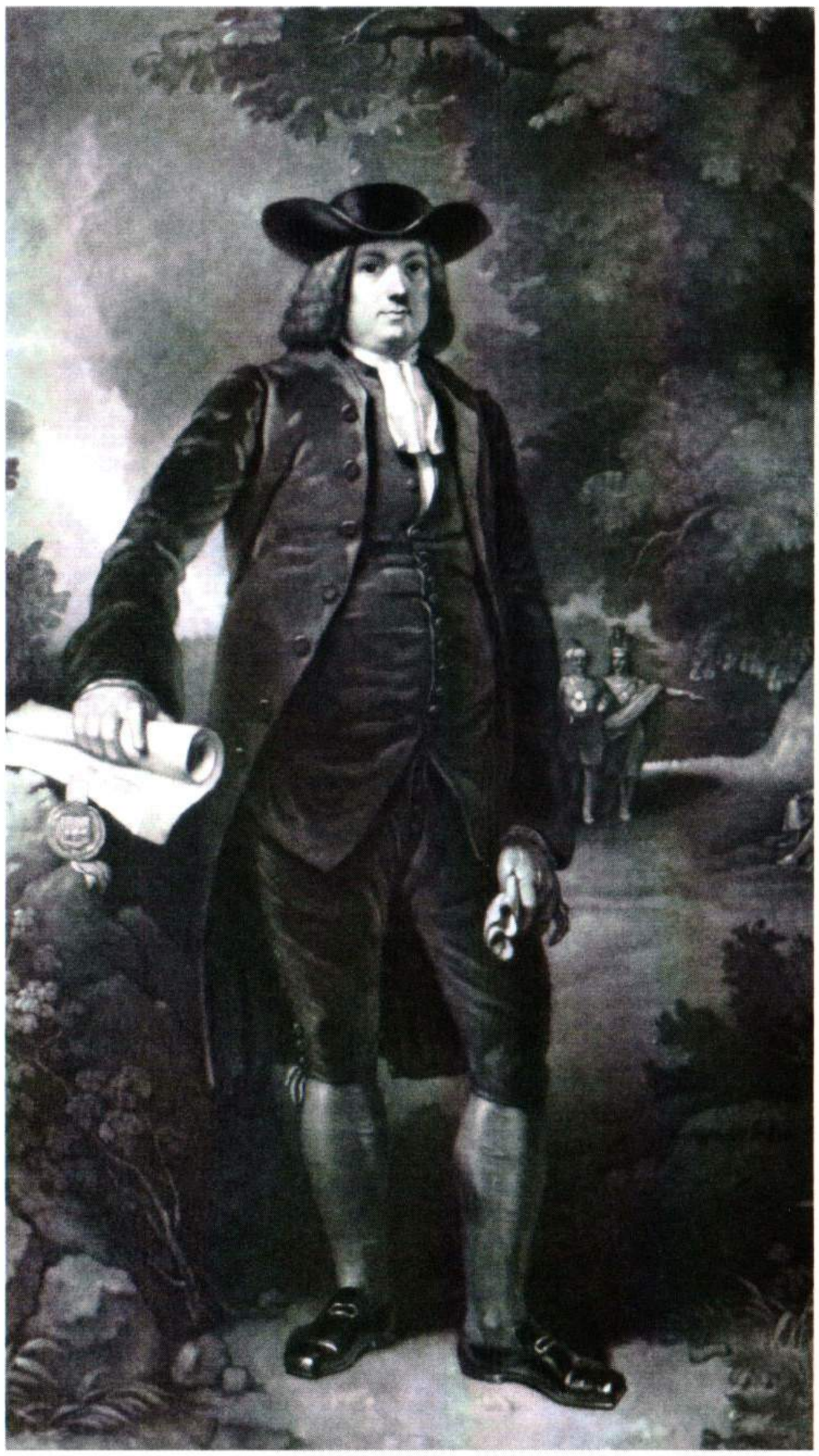
He later brought together advances in iron casting technology and merged them with the expertise of brass founders to make cast items which were more complex in shape and design. Darby perfected the process of casting brass and iron in sand moulds - a process which made possible the 'mass-production' of cast iron and brass goods. For the first time cast brass and ironware were not made on an individual basis. This was vital in being the first step towards 'factory-style' mass production and lead to massive increases in productivity, reduced unit costs and made 'goods' available to a wider geographical range of people. The items produced were important in meeting the expanding export market, the West African slave trade and for industrial and domestic use in the West Indian and American colonies.

Casting in sand also allowed for more complex castings to be made - this was vital for the future production of steam engines and other machinery.

Darby left the Bristol area in 1709 to set up a brass and iron works in Shropshire and It was here, at Coalbrookdale, that he laid the foundations for what was to become the most important iron producing area in the world. The area involved is now the Irónbridge Gorge Museums, on the banks of the River Severn and is designated a World Heritage Site.

William Penn (1644 -1718)

Penn was a devout Quaker and slave owning millionaire. As a commoner he became one of the largest private landowners the world has ever seen when he was Royally gifted the 40,000 square miles of what he named Pennsylvania. He saw himself as a superior person in society. From at least the time he was aged eleven his family owned slave servants and his first duty as an adult was to run the family's colonial Irish estate. Penn later inherited this estate upon his father's death.



Henry Inman. "William Penn." Philadelphia: 1834-35. Engraved and printed by John Sartain.

Penn became a Quaker at a time when Quakerism, because of massive repression by the state, had lost its revolutionary commonwealth zeal. The sect, in cities and towns at least, was now under the intellectual, moral and religious guidance of the Society's leading merchants, manufacturers, money lenders and landowners. Nationally the sect was led by the Quakers in London and it is with the wealthier strata of the sect that Penn identified. The leading Quakers had established a business and tight family network which crisscrossed not only Britain, Ireland and Northern Europe but reached across to the slave–based colonies of the West Indies and those on the American mainland.

When Penn was in Bristol he kept the company of Quakers who saw it as their life's mission to carry out God's work of

capitalist expansionism. The new western colonies needed commodities in huge quantities. Quakers produced commodities and they traded in them. With the ending of the London monopoly of the English slave trade Bristol's trade to Africa was starting to boom. With his positioning as a major player on the American Eastern seaboard (New York and the Jerseys) and the active West Indian Quaker network Penn was ideally placed to take the advantages offered him and his associates by the 'Triangular Trade'.

When Penn was on his 'missionary' travels to northern Europe, Ireland and Britain (1677 & 1685) he recruited settlers for his lands in America. These settlers, who come in their thousands, had to both purchase their land from Penn and pay him an annual rent (a quit rent). Penn had a good idea of how many people are coming across the Atlantic. However, this famous 'Friend of the Indians' omitted to inform the Native Americans the total expected number.

Penn eventually went to Pennsylvania himself but only when he had had erected, and expensively furnished mansion house, Pennsbury, complete with its house and field slaves. This is at a time when many poorer immigrants to the colony lived in caves.

The full history of the Penn family makes (and I say this myself) fascinating reading. So do buy, beg, borrow or steal the next booklet in this series.

Notes

1 The term 'Chattel Slavery' has been used in this booklet as a description of the kind of European slavery involved in the C17th onwards. The evolving mercantile world view viewed slaves and their descendants as personal property of the slave owners (in a very different way from previous slave systems - e.g. where slaves were captured enemies). Chattel Slavery was slavery used as labour under an emerging and consolidating capitalist system.

2 Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers; an association of rich, fiercely pro-slavery merchants who had the whip hand and ran the city of Bristol. To qualify for membership, merchants had to be male and members of the Church of England though this was to change as certain Quakers became wealthy and thereby gained membership of this influential club. The Merchant Venturers still exists today and its only female member to date was one Margaret Thatcher.

3 The first Quaker Meeting House within the city boundary was built on land purchased from the Dominican Friary in 1670 at what is now called Quakers Friars (part of the Cabot Circus shopping complex in central Bristol).

4 Kingswood: the district of Gloucestershire outside of Lawford's Gate.

5 Lawfords Gate: one of Bristol's ancient gateways – this one to the east of the city.

6 Baptist Mills: the lost community which is now Junction 3 on the M32, Bristol

7 Pyott lived in Lower Easton, Bristol. He was a friend of George Fox and accompanied him when spreading the Quaker message in Devon.

8 Guayaquil is in present day Ecuador.

(a) Denotes information kindly provided by Jonathan Harlow in his thesis, The Life and Times of Thomas Speed, University of the West of England, Bristol, July 2008.

Road signs in today's Bristol with references to early Quakerism

Look out for the second booklet in this series:

William Penn, Quaker ~ a profile

A history of how Five Generations of the Penn Family amassed Capital, Slaves and Vast Stretches of Colonial Land. It's a must-read!

Who were the Quakers? Why were they persecuted? Why did they stop being radical? How did some of Bristol's Quakers become so rich?

From James Naylor's blasphemous ride down Corn Street to William Penn being given Pennsylvania and Abraham Darby laying the foundations of the Industrial Revolution. This is the first of two pamphlets by Jim McNeill exploring the history of the Quakers in Bristol.